



Gwendolyn Parker

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I'd been trained in their very own breeding grounds, made my career at institutions that were still, at their pinnacles, overwhelmingly white and male. And though as a black female I was the perpetual outsider, persistently viewed as a trespasser on private preserve, at the same time it was a role I'd been groomed for since birth.

— Trespassing: My Sojourn in the Halls of Privilege

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Quick Facts

- * Born in 1950
- * African-American businesswoman and author
- * Writer of *These Same Long Bones* and *Trespassing*

Biography

Judson Garrett and Arona McDougald Parker welcomed their new child into the world on June 9, 1950, hence beginning the life for Gwendolyn M. Parker. The Parkers were Black middle-class homeowners in a city that boasted the highest percentage of home ownership for African Americans across the entire nation. Parker came from a well-known and well-respected family in North Carolina. There are streets in Durham that carry her family names and her great-grandfather assisted in establishing North Carolina College. In fact, Parker's grandmother's home has been remodeled to become the Office of Admissions. When she was ten years old her family moved from Durham to New York City.

This page was researched and submitted by: Sarah Bankenbusch, Audrey D. Johnson-Lewis, Kathryn Savyannah, and Tiffany Zarling on 3/16/00.



Gwendolyn Parker

Biography continued

Described as intelligent, educated, articulate, Gwendolyn M. Parker came from a privileged background. After graduating from some of the best schools (Kent School, Radcliffe College, and New York University Law School), she jumped onto the corporate ladder and made upward progress into such positions as a Wall Street lawyer and marketing manager. Suddenly, and quite unexpectedly, she jumped off the corporate ladder, disheartened by the racism, classism, and sexism she encountered in the corporate boardrooms. Today, living in Connecticut, she enjoys the solitude surrounding her life as a writer and feels that she is “contributing to my culture and human culture generally in a more profound way than I did in my business career.”

Parker’s first published work, *These Same Long Bones*, is woven in and through the Durham of her childhood. In this novel, her characters Sirus and Aileen McDougald experience the death of their daughter, Matti. They attempt to determine whether her death was an accident, or whether it was the result of Sirus’s refusal to allow local white businessmen to invest in his housing venture. The novel was favorably reviewed by Wendell Berry, who writes, “This is a big-hearted novel. Its subjects are loneliness and community, community failure and community responsibility, loss and grief and reconciliation, friendship, the coming of grace. These subjects, in our day, require courage and eloquence. Gwendolyn Parker has both.” Josephine Humphreys of the *New York Times Book Review* writes, “*These Same Long Bones* is a thoughtful and generous-hearted novel that shows a life ‘both blessed and hard,’ sustained by human resilience and always aglow with insoluble mystery.”

Her second published literary work, *Trespassing: My Sojourn in the Halls of Privilege*, is Parker’s memoir, focusing on her rise within and abrupt leave of the corporate world. In the memoir, Parker writes of her experiences with racism, classism, and sexism in corporate America, and about her discovery that to succeed in the corporate world, she would need not only to prove herself, but would have to do so while facing discrimination. Ultimately, Parker’s experiences convinced her to walk away from the boardroom to begin writing. In *Trespassing: My Sojourn in the Halls of Privilege*, Parker allows her readers to glimpse her real childhood in Durham as well as the family and community members who profoundly influenced her, including her grandmother. Deborah E. McDowell praises the memoir.



Gwendolyn Parker

Biography continued

Works by the author

Fiction

Trespassing: My Sojourn in the Halls of Privilege (1997).

These Same Long Bones (1994).

Works about the author

McDowell, Deborah E. "My Life as a Token" (*New York Times Book Review*, 1997).

Robinson, Lori S. "Memoir Peeks into 'Halls of Privilege'" (*Emerge*, 1997).

Smolowe, Jill. "Finally Having Their Say" (*Time*, 1997).

Simson, Maria and Genevieve Stuttaford. "Forecasts: Nonfiction" (*Publishers Weekly*, 1997).

Tonkin, Boyd. "Unfair Competitions?" (*New Statesman & Society*, 1995).

Frye, Michael and Shirley E. Havens. "Word of Mouth" (*Library Journal*, 1994).

"*These Same Long Bones*" (*New York Times Book Review*, 1994).

"And Bear in Mind" (*New York Times Book Review*, 1994).

Humphreys, Josephine. "The Thing About White People" (*New York Times Book Review*, 1994).

Bourne, Kay. "Writer Recalls Life in Corporate America" (*The Bay State Banner*, 1998).